

Man is the problem of Art and History

Dr. Wagih Fawzi Youssef

Abstract

The problem of art is inseparable from the problem of consciousness. Art was legislated by placing restrictions on the imagination. Romanticism, Symbolism, and Surrealism had been irrational forces channeled through the minds and imagination of artists. Art reduced to monetary value makes money-making the only art, the art to end all art, and modernist culture had reached the dead end. This reveals the bankruptcy of history as a value-producing ideal. It also reflects the cultural narrowness and suicidal exclusiveness inherent in the dogma of history as progress.

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Introduction

The problem of art was involved with the problem of history, and the problem of history is on the depths of man's nature and psyche. Most people live arbitrary, mechanical existences in which error and aberration succeed each other unendingly, while the mind is plagued with neuroses and the body with diseases. Psyche is unconscious and techne totally mechanical, for there is no recognized relation between the two. Psyche and techne, give rise to consciousness. A building is built from what the eyes report to the mind. Our eyes feed our reason. Thus as culture develops along profit-making lines that stress novelty for the sake of innovation. The artist is swept along with no assurance of success. The problem lies in society's unquestioning acceptance of the roles of artist as absolutely distinct. The problem of specialization did not come until the development of a mechanistic technology. Thus the various arts were practiced as crafts, because there was a genuine involvement of the people in a creative project and so there was no reason to proclaim or criticize accomplishments. The criticism of today which defines art is the result of aesthetic confusion consequent to the breakdown of collective spiritual tradition. The world was built from what the eyes report to the body. The visual is that which makes possible the specialized concept of art distinct from the practice of a craft.

The Renaissance and the Baroque

Art developed in Renaissance period to be distinct from craft. More interesting, the Renaissance artist's identity set the stage for that of his polar opposite, the scientist, whose image often is not that of the rugged individualist but that of the self effacing servant. However, the scientist and artist are really the same person split into two bodies. The ingenuity and refinement of art is surpassed by the ingenuity and ultra-refinement of technology, with its avant-garde, the armaments industry, the cultivation of sense desires is outstripped only by the holy awe of cities enflamed by war.

The orders of the Vitruvian proportion and the sequence of linear perspective lay the evolutionary snare of culture. With the world itself divided into objective and subjective realms, the function of fine art became to objectify what is essentially subjective. The Renaissance artist

undid the collective association of the Medieval guild system. At the same time, feeling insecure without guild, the artist demanded a recognition he felt would place him on equal basis with the philosopher and the scientist. The arts are learnt by reason and method; they are mastered by practice. The expressive function of art has its sources in the deep irrational levels of being, it no longer serves its true purpose to inform and inspire as the very breadth of life itself. The very question indicates how far the creative process had been separated from its psychic origins. What Socrates had called the divine madness was rationalized into the anthropomorphic muses of 18th c. culture, faintly disguised dramatizations of society. A mental stage was established according to the rigorous perspective system. Culture in this sense, is the universally understood means of expression of a given social organism; the more highly integrated the culture, the more conscious and universally shared are the means and meaning of expression. The effect of different sensory agents acting upon the participant simultaneously transfuses and uplifts the whole being, evoking a transcendent experience.

One may recall the synchronization of the water sculpture, lights, and music by the great Baroque artist Gian Lorenzo Bernini who was quite familiar with the nature of the mystical experience. In that time Europeans suffered increasing sensorial fragmentation as an inevitable result of the mechanization of consciousness, which naturally limits the organism to a splintered, sequential point of view. The cultural disintegration caused by mechanized consciousness was supported by the academics and rationalized into a new belief system, Siegfried Gideon has described this system as the creed of progress. He said that the contrast should be stressed between the ancient and the modern outlook. The ancients perceived the world as eternally existing and self-renewing, whereas we perceive it as created and existing within temporal limits, that is, the world is determined to a specific goal and purpose.

Closely bound up with this belief that the world has a definite purpose is the outlook of rationalism. Rationalism goes hand in hand with the idea of progress. Not only was art rational, but in the art of history painting the noblest visual art conceivable. Painting became the art of representing natural bodies. Man is assumed as having a development apart from the general development of nature which is seen by rationalism as devoid of consciousness, intelligence and feeling. Seeing everything as a linear progression of causes and effects that gives a false order to history, just as the invention of the clock imposed a false regimentation of time itself. The history of the world began from the 18th c. to the present and is characterized by 1) the mechanization of consciousness, the materialization of values and the industrialization of human society; 2) accelerated social and political change, revolution, and world warfare; 3) cultural disintegration and mystical aspiration.

The Industrial Revolution

Technological development is the symbol for change and movement This was the period of intense industrialization and the consequent transformation of the world into a field for materialist imperialism and technological conquest. History was made to read as if it were a linear prelude to the exclusive development of modern European thought and culture; the

Egyptian pyramids led directly to the dynamo; all other cultural achievements were considered subsidiary. The incentive for transforming history and art into intellectual techniques derived from the sciences. The history of art was formulated as a science predicated on the existence of certain artifacts from Mediterranean antiquity. The artist believed that the best art must imitate nature, as such being too base and vulgar. History as science must begin with art, for artifact is all that remains of history. It is not surprising that the artistic style of the first Industrial Revolution was an exacting archaeological historicism. History also reflects the belief that man is the absolute master of planetary events though the technically oriented force of history may seek the systematic repression of psych which represents the path to the source of life itself. There was also reflected the Romantic urge of a mystical reunion with the forces of nature. Refusing to believe in a transcendental reality, abstract artists closed themselves off to the conscious power of symbols. But those who are near sighted retarded the movement.

The Swiss painter Paul Klee said that the more horrifying the world becomes, the more art becomes abstract, while a world at peace produces realistic art. By abstract art Klee meant an art that is the product and the expression of the deep psychic disturbances. The modernist knows this and hence his art is difficult and meaningless. Thus art lost its soul. Thousands of artists were seeking some new mannerism. This was during the First World War, without enthusiasm, with cold hearts, so the public lost interest in their art and turned away and individual mannerism is considered normal. In this case Cubism has created a myth that concealed the void left by the artists, and Picasso came and made a complete control of psyche by techne who by 1940 was the most famous artist in the world.

Because the artist's function in a technological society has never been clear, the lives of the modern visionary artists have been filled with suffering, social conflict and despair have escaped the psychotic affliction of the industrial age visionaries. Culture cannot be said to exist, only politics and machines, and at one point even this distinction becomes blurred, hence we arrive at technocracy, in which all organic functions are subject to a process no one can control. Reality is then experienced as a congelation, known as wars. And as density increases so does the sensation of an imminent climax.

Futurists, Dadaists and Surrealists

A small group of Italian artists in the 20th c. made a formal declaration of war on the culture that had been born in their soil and gave rise to modern man calling it Futurism. There were mottos such as: love of danger, rebellion, ecstasy and sleep, the beauty of speed, no masterpiece without aggressiveness, time and space died yesterday, we live in the absolute, the beautiful Ideas that kill, the contempt for women, fight against moralism, multi-colored and polyphonic surfaces of revolutions in modern capital cities and applause of an enthusiastic crowd. Their cause was nothing less than the supreme victory of the machine. To them, progress was not swift enough. Their mechanical ecstasy signaled the triumph of reason and mass consciousness, and the total suppression of the feminine, intuitive nature of things and human affairs are guided completely by the impulses Uranus, the planet of revolution, and Neptune, the planet of mass

collective movements. The result is a jumble of images in which time past and time future dissolve into one violent frenzy.

What the Futurists spurned, with their contempt for women and the aspects of consciousness they considered weak, the Dadaists embraced with fondness and love. Their poems became the automatic writing of the Surrealists. More than anything, the adventure of playing with the moment of taking and accepting the moment of being receptive to chance, suspending all preconception, let certain of the Dadaists, at least, to the border of a new psychic experience of the world. In the absolutism of its principles, Surrealism was ultimately another form of tyranny, replacing the terror of reason with the terror of unreason. The Futurists, the Dadaists, and the Surrealists were all self-conscious European intellectuals if anything defeated them it was the accumulated weight of hundreds of years of materialistic, intellectually structured perceptions that they could only create fragments, nightmares, dreams.

According to W.B. Yeats, a slow death began around 1050; the Gothic Cathedrals are the hallucinating tombstones of the initial stage of death. The fact that the feminine principle is so idealized in the cathedrals only implies that mankind had already divorced itself from the vital feminine aspect of life. Thus since the eleventh century Western man has been in a stage intermediate between death and a new birth, a stage filled with prodigious vision and struggles, and yet increasingly lifeless. Material expansion is not identical with true growth. As the Surrealist painter Matta declared, "History is the story of man's various hallucinations." Once man is freed from these hallucinations, history as we know it may no longer exist, but there may be some potential for conscious understanding and growth. Yeats was very vague about the future, aside from suggesting a dramatic reversal. Yeats also spoke of the marriage of Europe and Asia, though he was confused about what this might actually mean. He left us a clue when he spoke of the westward movement of antithetical Renaissance culture, which implies that the so-called New World, the Western Hemisphere, is the primary force toward which the antithetical is drawn. Neuro-physiologically this corresponds to a movement from the intellectual left hemisphere to the intuitive right. Clearly Romanticism, primitivism, abstractionism, and even Surrealism have all evoked the Great Return; but they were all too reactionary to contain an authentic vision of the seed which depends on understanding what comes after.

Surrealists were very much a part of the European tradition in its autumn phase. Their manifestos were addressed to the past and not to the future, their work tended to dwell on the Freudian neuroses, which are oriented strictly toward the past, rather than exploring the archetypes, which represent simultaneously the past and the future. It is only with the Romantic rebellion against this deadly classicism that the thread of the true European spirit is rediscovered and a great effort of artistic regeneration is pursued which ended in the synthetic drama attempted by Wagner and visualized at a future range of completeness. Since most artists try to develop a certain style that they can identify with in order that their art will become marketable commodity, they choose the second option rather than the first. The Pop artists ignored the criteria traditionally applied to works of art; yet their work was justified as art by a literature as intellectual and academic as any in the history of Pop art which is ultimately the history of art

historical criticism. Not only does concept art represent the final disintegration of traditional art, but it also represents the final sellout of the human spirit to the highest bidder, which is the illusion of history itself.

Art Museums

Knowing that knowledge is power, and power is the key to historical identity, the modernist avant-garde artist has sought the same end, if by a slightly different course, which is art history. Art museum was originally conceived as the tomb of the muses of the ancient Mediterranean humanist tradition, a place where the desecrated relics of dead civilization could be categorized and displayed like trophies of war. As the heart of technological culture, the museum confers the value of a noble death on all official culture and anti-culture. At one time all museums, where they were devoted to science or art, were built in the neoclassical style. Museums built since then have displayed a kind of technological neoclassicism, the columns and fountains are there. By the 1960s, the museum was not only the house of the past but had also become the central cog of contemporary anti-culture. That museums of modern art are becoming standard features in the major cities of the world indicates that modernism itself has died, perhaps with the atomic bomb. The artist needs the art gallery to purvey his work and the art critic to explain it to his audience.

Art reduced to monetary value makes money-making the only art, the art to end all art, and modernist culture had reached the dead end. This reveals the bankruptcy of history as a value-producing ideal. It also reflects the cultural narrowness and suicidal exclusiveness inherent in the dogma of history as progress. Art history is a set of perceptions extracted from the general European study of history in the 18th c. and broken into a rigid set of categories in the nineteenth. These categories consist of a linear sequence; ancient art meaning that art of the ancient Mediterranean, including Egypt and the ancient Near East, Medieval art, Renaissance art, Baroque art, and modern art based specifically a stylistic concept drawn from studies of the evolution of later Renaissance and antique styles. Modern culture is exclusively part of a European value system. The Orient has generally been perceived and understood only through European perception.

Conclusion

The problem of art is inseparable from the problem of consciousness. Art was legislated by placing restrictions on the imagination. The abolition of art from artistic activity, resulting in the happenings and pop art resulting in minimal art and concept art. The artist and his activity represent the condition of human consciousness. When there is an artistic and cultural breakdown, the human species is suffering its own spiritual death.

Romanticism, Symbolism, and Surrealism had been irrational forces channeled through the minds and imagination of artists. But because art itself had been subverted by techne, the psychedelic experience was to be moving through the public imagination regardless of artistic inclination. The visionary experience that had been so rare to the European technological mind since the advent of the printing press became a commonplace. Young people began to leave the

academies and they were performing a new, hypnotically rhythmic electronic music, running light shows. The tyranny of the word had been broken, the spell of the printed message had been shattered. The psychedelic carnival of the 1960s was a cultural enactment of multi-media events in an effort at recreating the powerful psychic experiences. From the Romantics to the Surrealists people rejects history and its implacable dialectic outright and all that it entails; politics, academic knowledge and technology. The rejection of history, the ideological underpinning of the present civilization, is a prelude to the apocalypse. Apocalypse means revelation, disclosure, being without one's clothes. By opening up the visionary experience, psychedelics had helped many individuals see beyond history. Born from the tension of the timeless and time-bound is the politics of the nervous system, the politics of ecstasy that aims toward abolishing history, alchemy, witchcraft, astrology, the entire train of secret arts whose resurrection which were called for in the Surrealist Manifesto. Any experience that transcends this ideology is therefore regarded as archaic or regressive.

Tradition literally means to give over, not in books but literally by word of mouth and symbols. From the historical point of view, tradition had been interpreted as precluding direct experience, and it is therefore considered a deterrent to progress. The ideology of modern history, which is progress at all costs, is directly opposed to tradition, which is rooted in the cosmic sense of being, a sense in which even progress is an egotistic illusion. This state of affairs seems to validate the assumption that creativity is a special human attribute. Because the practice of seeing through thought is fundamental to all experience of a cosmic nature, primary geometrical forms have persisted throughout human culture. Art is not a thing done but a dissolution of the ego. Whereas materialistic view is that creation is an addition to reality. Creation is actually a dissolution of duality and a merging into a unitive state producing a transformation of reality.